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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

OTC Medications, What's Out There? Risks and Benefits

Over the Counter (OTC) medications offer options for us to treat minor health problems. Medications have helped prolong human life but can also have negative effects.

Cough and Cold (C&C) products have high potential to cause harm. Their side effects include mental problems, heart and lung issues, and may reduce how well we are able to control our diabetes. and more. Because the medications can affect many parts of our body, it is important to tell your physician if you use them. C&C products often contain the same ingredients that can be found in multiple other products for other conditions. For example, separate products labeled to treat: colds, sinus problems, flu, cough, even sleep aids, may each contain the same ingredient, diphenhydramine, known to cause constipation, urinary issues, sedation, impaired thinking and reaction time. Consumers are at risk of taking multiple doses of diphenhydramine without knowing it if they are taking several medications for different reasons that all contain the same ingredients. This is especially problematic in seniors with memory problems and chronic diseases. The prescription medications used to improve memory in Alzheimer's increase acetylcholine, a chemical that helps memory. Over the counter diphenhydramine decreases acetylcholine activity, a prevalent ingredient in C&C products, can severely impair memory and thinking.

Other popular OTC medications for treating pain, stomach problems, diarrhea, and constipation have risks as well. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can cause liver damage and interfere with blood thinning therapy, while non-steroidal pain relievers such as naproxen (Aleve®) can hurt kidney func-



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tion, cause blood thinning and make heart failure worse. Antacids such as Rolaids® can cause kidney stones, and worsen heart and kidney failure. Newer stomach agents such as Prilosec® are capable of interactions with multiple prescription drugs to either cause them to become less powerful or cause the damage. OTC diarrheal and constipation medications can cause fluid retention or loss, and interfere with other drug therapy.

How can a person possibly know if an OTC product is safe to use?

- Never assume that because a medication is OTC that it's safe.
- Always let your doctor know about taking OTCs.
- Make sure there is an important reason for taking each medication (OTC or not).

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- · Familiarize yourself with the active ingredients to help prevent duplicate dosing and interactions. A different brand name doesn't always mean a different active ingredient.
- · If you need help obtaining information, ask your pharmacist, consult the internet, or your doctor.

In general, OTC medications are helpful and safe for temporary use and if you find need to take an OTC chronically, make sure to consult your doctor.

For More Information:

- Visit www.polypharmacyinitiative.com
- Discuss your over the counter medication use with your pharmacist or doctor.

Special Thanks to Demetra E. Antimisiaris, PharmD, CGP, FASCP for the provision of this article. Demetra E. Antimisiaris, PharmD, is a Certified Geriatrics Pharmacist, a fellow of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists and is a graduate of UCLA's geriatrics pharmacist residency program. Dr. Antimisiaris is a faculty member of the University of Louisville Department of Family and Geriatric Medicine.

Coming Soon: Walk With Ease

There is a new program coming soon to Kentucky called **Walk with Ease**. This program was created by the Arthritis Foundation to help people reduce pain and improve overall health. Even if you do not have Arthritis you may benefit from this program.

If you can be on your feet for 10 minutes without increased pain this program maybe for you!

- It will help motivate you to get into shape.
- Help you to walk safely and comfortably.
- Improve your flexibility, strength, and stamina.
- Reduce pain and help you feel great.

You can participate in this program either individually or in a group setting. The group program Contact your local Area Agency on Aging and Independent Living to get signed up.

For More Information:

- Arthritis Foundation—http://www.arthritis.org/resources/community-programs/walk-with-ease/
- Area Agencies on Aging and Independent Living http://chfs.ky.gov/dail/AreaAgenciesonAging.htm

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